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ABSTRACT

Given the assignment of school newspaper adviser, an English teacher should consider the desired content and focus of the newspaper. Policy, philosophy, and procedure can be developed by the adviser with the help of the staff. To motivate student participation in the production of the paper, the editors and entire staff need to develop a sense of "ownership" of the paper, which can happen if the adviser places the responsibility in the students' hands. Producing a school newspaper inherently creates a series of contradictions: (1) class routine must be far more highly structured and organized than in any regular classroom situation, yet remain flexible: (2) students must be responsible decision makers, yet be allowed to make mistakes: (3) demands must be stricter, more objective, yet praise must be given lavishly: (4) minds must be open to opinions, yet strong enough in conviction to take a stand when appropriate: and (5) hard work must develop pride, yet no one can be too good to clean the waxer or sweep up paper. (A checklist for new advisers of things to do is provided.) (HOD)

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Who? Me? Sponsor the School Newspaper?
First Steps

Who---me? Sponsor the school newspaper?

Yes--YOU!

But. . .

And that's how it happened. Settled into teaching English classes for a dozen or so years, the impact of being handed the new assignment was a little like the impact of being handed a time bomb set to explode at any moment. Knowing that the recent adviser spent two years consuming prodigious amounts of Maalox and muttering incoherently through classrooms and corridors didn't do a whole lot to reassure me. Nor did remembering that the adviser before this outgoing one had simply "flipped" along about Thanksgiving time three years ago--abandoning the school newspaper and his classes to the whims of the fickle prairie winds that sweep relentlessly across northeastern Colorado.

Now the paper had been tossed at me. And I had the feeling it had landed--not neatly on the front doorstep--but where I might have to fish it out of a mud puddle or search for it among the needles of overgrown juniper bushes. I felt like a visitor in a foreign land--a land of advertisers' and printers' jargon, of billing and bookkeeping, of cameras and film speeds and dark rooms with chemicals and timers; a land of schedules and organization and deadlines to keep; a land of rights and responsibilities and legalities I'd never thought of before.

Well. So. Here I was. I'd better "take stock." Although I was painfully aware of my inadequacies at the time, I could not

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have known then how very inadequate I really was--and it's lucky I didn't know. Actually, I did have some things going for me. I believed then--and now believe even more strongly--in the existence of a school newspaper. I also believed in the power of the school publication for positive or negative influence. My background for newspaper production was not as thin as it looked on paper (one three-hour journalism course in advanced feature writing). I had been active in my high school years on the newspaper and yearbook staffs. I had worked (and do work) at the local newspaper office as a substitute copy reader, proof reader, reporter, and newswriter. And I was writing a weekly newspaper column on education. So the newspaper office was not a completely foreign land. Besides, the school principal supported the production of a student publication--at least within certain limits, mainly financial.

But now I had to confront the assignment. What did I need to do to be able to run a newspaper production from beginning to end? At least I'd learned of my responsibility in the spring rather than on the first day of the new school term. I had time to get some kind of guidance. I searched catalogs of nearby colleges and universities for summer newspaper adviser workshops. I found two scheduled and signed up for both. I joined the Journalism Education Association and wrote to the executive director of the Colorado High School Press Association. She happened to have been an English teacher-turned-journalism-adviser herself and responded immediately with many specific helps.

When you're going in "cold" to something, it's hard to absorb and to understand the deluge of new materials. Information inundates and paralyzes the mind. And because of your ignorance, you don't even know the right questions to ask. But the workshops were a

vital first step. Talking with other advisers and creating and maintaining a personal awareness of what goes on in the publishing of school newspapers began to seep in.

When the workshops were over, though, the moment of truth presented itself. The adviser must face his/her own situation alone. No one else can try to figure out what will work best--or even just work--given the people and the situation with which the adviser has to work.

First, I sorted things out for myself. I had to decide what kind of school paper I was willing to sponsor or was not willing to sponsor. I would not sponsor a news bulletin, a gossip column, or a corny jokes flyer (though humor, of course, has its place). If I were going to sponsor a school publication, its content must at least attempt to be worthy of the paper and its printing costs. Together, the staff and I should agree on a statement of policy, philosophy, and procedure. We would organize in a way that would attempt to represent fairly, factually, honestly, and completely all aspects and people of our school. Not only should we inform our readers, but we should try to show them life in our school in new and meaningful ways. And--we would try to entertain our readers. If the occasion required, we would take a stand on an issue and at the same time represent all sides of that issue in the paper. The production of the paper would train students to be professional in their approach to journalism. Staff members need warning that publishing the paper demands that they be cooperative, dependable, flexible, responsible, aware, willing to work hard and long. Newspaper people are required to accept the consequences of their decisions. With so many demands and so few rewards (taking the class would keep some of my top students off our school's honor roll because journalism is not listed as an "academic"). Who would sign up? Answer:

They sign up because it's exciting, it's dangerous, it's different. There's freedom and there's responsibility. It's a step toward independence and adulthood.

Editors in particular and the entire staff need to develop a sense of "ownership" of the paper. This can happen only when the adviser places the responsibility in the students' hands and stands back as adviser, just as the name says. Decisions are made by the group after careful discussion, research, and planning.

Maybe it's not wise to make changes in "tradition" during the first year under a new adviser. But our small staff of ten (which dwindled to eight when two moved out of town) turned the old paper inside out.

First, we changed the printing method. That decision meant we must sell much more advertising to pay for added costs. We held a week long workshop before school opened so we could get our first issue out within a couple of weeks after school began. We set up a production schedule that tripled the number of papers produced [redacted] the previous year. During the first week of school, we announced a contest to re-name the paper. Blasphemy!--the name was a tradition. Who did we think we were--messing around with tradition?! But we did it. The paper got a new name and a new look. That was shocking enough, but what really brought the wrath of the school upon our heads was when we did not print class wills in the graduation issue. We got our battle wounds in that fight, but now--less than three years later--hardly anyone remembers wills. Our special senior features are tradition for our school.

Once we got the first issue out, we settled into specific assignments. Since the staff I inherited was a "mixed bag" of experience and inexperience as well as of personalities and social groups, we spent a bit of time in finding where each one functioned

most happily for the whole group. We were small enough, too, that everyone knew what everyone else was doing and thus could "fill in" in emergencies for one another. We decided to have co-editors. Sometimes this works and sometimes it doesn't, I've learned since then. I was a trifle nervous about this arrangement since the two obvious choices were direct opposites in nature. It was this very opposite-ness, though, that proved to be the magic formula. Susan-the-organizer and David-the-easy-going learned to work with, respect and complement each other. We found that different people were truly suited to certain niches and began to operate like a machine--a rusty one, but at least the idea was there.

That year I learned that the producing of a school newspaper inherently creates a series of contradictions:

--Class routine must be far more highly structured and organized here than in any regular classroom situation; yet one must at the same time be more flexible and allow more freedom of all kinds.

--Students must be responsible decision-makers, yet--because of their age and lack of experience--be allowed to make mistakes in order to learn.

--Demands must be stricter, colder, more objective than in the regular classroom. Conversely, when praise is earned, it must be given lavishly and with almost ritualistic celebration.

--Minds must be open to all opinions, yet strong enough in conviction to take a stand when that is appropriate.

--Intelligence, dedication, imagination, and hard work must develop great pride in what is being produced; yet no one can be "too good" to clean the waxer or sweep up paper or type someone else's "copy." Every day we recognize that mistakes are made and that we have weaknesses. Humility and pride become intermingled.

--The "newspaper affair" breeds a love-hate relationship, one that has the potential to destroy or to create those who partake of it. It is an affair, too, that continually humbles, continually presents new challenges and problems, continually demands growth.

WARNING to English teachers assigned to become newspaper advisers: If you're not physically strong, emotionally callous on the outside and soft on the inside, blessed with unlimited stamina, willing and able to give numberless hours and weekends and vacations; if you like things to be neat and orderly and to operate according to plan; if you're afraid of criticism; if you resist taking risks--refuse the assignment.

But if you decide to give it a try--then---

When you see kids pouring over the latest issue of the school paper at lunch, in the library, as they walk through the corridors; when you catch them stealing reading time with the paper hidden inside their text books--

When you see a student finish reading the newest issue and then neatly store it in a notebook filled with past issues--

When staff members sparkle ideas, laugh and yell and cry at and with each other--and stand together against the whole school--

When staff members admire other school papers on the exchange mail and then say, "Ours is pretty terrific!"--

And when newspaper graduates are sought out by the colleges to serve on their newspaper staffs--

When the staff members--and you--learn to love the smell of the printer's ink when that newest issue rolls off the press--

Then, Shake hands, Friend--it's in your blood!

Beverly Haley
Fort Morgan (CO) High School
Organizing the School Newspaper

A checklist of things to do for new and very green advisers:

Take stock of your situation:
physical facilities, time, money
your own background, skills, potentialities, personality
administrative support
staff members' background, training or lack of it, skills, interests, activities, personalities, potentialities, areas of strengths and weaknesses.

Decide how to make the best use of what you have.

List the things you need and/or want to make your operation run the way you hope it might. How can you get those things? Where can you get help? Who can help you?

Prepare yourself in any and every way possible in the amount of time you have:
take workshops, conferences
read, read, read--both how-to's and all kinds of newspapers
develop a personal awareness
talk to other advisers, former students on the newspaper staff, students presently of college newspaper staffs, local newspaper people

Establish a regular and open and sharing relationship with the local newspaper editor and staff and with your printer.

Decide on and define your personal philosophy about producing the school newspaper--there ARE differences between it and the professional newspaper. Decide where you are willing and able to bend and where you are not willing to compromise your beliefs and standards.

Formulate a tentative plan for production after consulting with the principal as well as with the school paper's editor, if you have one that "comes with your territory."

Call a staff and/or editorial board meeting:
decide on a plan for the paper's philosophy/content/format
get administration's okay
make tentative staff assignments
set up schedule for production and stick with it
set up back-up system within staff task assignments

Make a staff book--copies for each staff member and for administrators

Hold advertising workshop--then have a sales campaign.

At mid-year, begin recruiting for next year's staff. This year's staff members are the best salespersons for this. <u>Build your program</u> (this takes TIME).

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Organizing the School Newspaper

Staff members need access to:

- newspaper stylebooks (Associated Press and others)
- list of organizations, sponsors, officers
- school activities calendar
- teacher class schedule assignments
- student schedule cards
- addresses and telephone numbers of advertisers, administration, printers, local newspaper and radio/tv stations, police department

Each year a staff book should be made up and every staff member be given a copy to use throughout the year. At a minimum, the staff book contains a statement of policy, list of staff members with addresses and phone numbers, list of publication dates and deadline for copy dates, staff assignments (i.e., editor, photographer, etc.), "beat" assignments, advertising assignments, directions for preparing copy, staff style book, job descriptions for each staff assignment

Our calendar:

	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs	Fri.	
week one	evaluation day	mailouts bills new assign. ~~ad copy due~~	plan mini-dummies take photos	section meetings	firming up special tasks	
week two	work days story copy due		editing print photos	rewrites	write heads captions copy to printer	
week three	page editors rest staff. brainstorm. special lessons	dummy begin paste up		paste up	distribution	plan next issue "futures"
	Staff	Staff	Editors	Staff	Editors	Ed. Bd.